

# Assessment of Psychological Distress among B.Sc Nursing Students at SRM College of Nursing

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Psychological distress has been widely used as an indicator of mental health. Psychological distress is a term used, both by some mental health practitioners and users of mental health services, to describe a range of symptoms and experiences of a person's internal life that are commonly held to be troubling, confusing or out of the ordinary.

**Objectives :** The objectives were (i) to assess the level of psychological distress among the nursing students ii) to find out the association between level of psychological distress among the nursing students with their socio demographic variables.

**Methodology:** The quantitative research approach and Non-Experimental descriptive design was adopted. The study was conducted with 181 samples of nursing students using Non probability convenient sampling technique. The study was conducted at SRM College of Nursing, Kattankulathur, Kancheepuram district. The data was analysed and interpreted based on the objectives using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Results:** The results revealed that In B.Sc (N) I year, majority 27 (61%) of them had evidence of moderate psychological distress 14 (32%) of them had better mental health and 3 (7%) of them had severe problems with psychological distress. Among B.Sc (N) II year students, majority 29 (61%) of them had better mental health and 18 (39%) of them had evidence of moderate psychological distress. Among B.Sc (N) III year students, the majority 34 (77%) of them had better mental health and 10 (23%) had evidence of moderate psychological distress. Among B.Sc (N) IV year students, majority 40 (87%) of them had better mental health and only 6 (13%) had evidence of moderate psychological distress .

**Conclusion:** The results of the study concluded that psychological distress was increased in first year nursing students which was greatly reduced in final year nursing students. This study shows results that the imperative need to understand about level of psychological distress among nursing students.

**Keywords:** *psychological distress, mental health*

## Introduction

Health is understood to be not just the absence of illness; its definition implies a comprehensive and

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integrative understanding of people that includes many interrelated social, psychological and physical factors. Likewise, the World Health Organization proposes that "the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental disorders can help to maintain or improve health, have a positive effect on quality of life and can be economically beneficial". The availability of mental health records and information systems is necessary for conducting research and studies on mental health promotion and prevention in college students, and institutions of higher education have made a commitment

to this process for some time<sup>1</sup>.

During the academic year, nursing students face many risk situations that can alter their academic achievement and cause them psychological distress. The most common sources of this distress are their workload and problems associated with their studies, fear of unknown situations and difficulties during their clinical practices. In addition, students must embody certain personal factors (assertiveness, being able to say no, confrontation, self-esteem and social relationships) that involve multiple and significant adaptations that they must adequately and immediately make during their training period. If these risks are not recognized, they can negatively affect the student's health, learning or academic self-efficacy, satisfaction with their studies and, consequently, the quality of the attention they offer patients during clinical practice<sup>2</sup>.

Psychological distress has been widely used as an indicator of mental health. Researchers such as **Horwitz** consider it a transient emotional response to stress, which if untreated is pathological resulting in depression. Others such as **Wheaton** argue that psychological distress is a relatively stable condition which impacts on social functioning and day-to-day living. There is general consensus in the literature that psychological distress is an emotional state characterised by symptoms of depression and anxiety. The authors concur with Horowitz that psychological distress if left untreated can have deleterious impact upon mental health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

Psychological distress is important from a health promotion/illness prevention perspective because of its links with risk behaviours and physical illness in higher education students and its propensity to precede more serious mental health disorders. It is also of concern to education providers because of its negative impact on student learning<sup>4</sup>.

The existence of psychological distress has been recognized for thousands of years. For example, the book of job illustrates a classic case of psychologically distressed man, he lost interest in things he used to like doing, became hopeless, withdrawn, self-blaming, self-depreciating and had sleep disturbance, **Kovacs and Beck (1978)** states that even 3,900 years old Egyptian manuscript provides an accurate picture of the distressed person as pessimistic, his losing faith in others, unable

to carry out the everyday tasks of life and his serious consideration of suicide. These historical descriptions are congruent with some of the present accounts of the phenomenon of psychological distress<sup>5</sup>.

Understanding of psychological distress has been controversial for many years. The major dispute among students of psychological distress has been over the meaning of the concept, and about what actually is meant by the assertion that a person is psychologically distressed (**Torkington, 1991**)<sup>6</sup>.

**Divya Merciline and O.S. Ravindran (2013)** conducted a study on personality characteristics and psychological distress among nursing students in Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai to find out the personality characteristics and to identify the presence of depression, anxiety and stress among undergraduate nursing students of both first and final year. The sample for the study consisted of 100 subjects (16 males and 84 females). They were assessed by the following tools: General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), and Depression Anxiety and Stress Questionnaire (DASS). Results were discussed using percentages and t-test. Results indicated that the first year students have experienced higher level of distress than the final year students<sup>7</sup>.

## Materials and Method

The study was conducted in SRM college of Nursing, Kattankulathur. The sample size was 181 students and Non probability convenient sampling technique was adopted. The investigator collected the data within the stipulated time; a brief explanation was given explaining the purpose of the study with their consent so as to gain their co operation during the process of data collection. Demographic data of the students were collected by Using the structured questionnaire and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) was used to assess psychological distress among nursing students. The findings were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistics.

## Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by research committee of SRM College of Nursing, SRM University, Kattankulathur. Permission was obtained from the Dean, SRM College of Nursing. Informed consent was obtained from the study participants, after explaining the

nature and duration of the study. Assurance was given to the individual that report will be kept confidential.

## Results

**Table: 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of demographic variables of B.Sc Nursing students**

(N=181)

S.No.	Demographic Variables	No. of respondents (n)	Percentage distribution (%)	
1	Age	< 20 Years	100	55.2
		21-23 Years	58	32.0
		> 23 Years	23	12.7
2	Gender	Male	10	5.5
		Female	171	94.5
3	Year of Study	B.Sc N I year	44	24.3
		B.Sc N II year	47	26.0
		B.Sc N III year	44	24.3
		B.Sc N IV year	46	25.4
4	Educational Status of Parents	Primary School	34	18.8
		High School	70	38.7
		College	45	24.9
		No Formal Education	18	9.9
		Others	14	7.7
5	Occupation of Parents	Social Worker	41	22.7
		Business	46	25.4
		Painter	6	3.3
		Government Worker	20	11.0
		Private Worker	68	37.6

The data indicates that, with respect to the age group ,majority of nursing students 100 (55%) were below 20 years and 23 (13%) of them were more than 23 years. With respect to gender, majority of them 171 (95%) were female and only 10 (6%) were male. With respect to year of study, the majority of them 47 (26%) were studying

B.Sc Nursing II year and 44 (24%) were studying B.Sc Nursing I year & B.Sc Nursing III year. With respect to educational status of parents, majority of them 70 (39%) has studied up to High school. Considering the occupational status, majority of them 68 (38%) were private workers and 6 (3%) of them were painter.

**Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of level of psychological distress among B.Sc Nursing I year students (N=44)**

S.No	Level of Psychological Distress	No.of Respondents (n)	Percentage distribution (%)
1	Better mental health	14	32
2	Evidence of moderate psychological distress	27	61
3	Severe problems with psychological distress	3	7

Table 2 revealed that the majority 27 (61%) of them had evidence of moderate level of psychological distress 14 (32%) of them had better mental health and 3 (7%) of them had severe problems with psychological distress.

**Table 3: Frequency and percentage distribution of level of psychological distress among B.Sc Nursing II year students (N=47)**

S.No	Level of Psychological Distress	No.of Respondents (n)	Percentage distribution (%)
1	Better mental health	29	61
2	Evidence of moderate psychological distress	18	39
3	Severe problems with psychological distress	-	-

Table 3 revealed that the majority 29 (61%) of them had evidence of Better mental health 18 (39%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress.

**Table: 4 Frequency and percentage distribution of level of psychological distress among B.Sc Nursing III year students (N=44)**

S.No	Level of Psychological Distress	No.of Respondents (n)	Percentage %
1	Better mental health	34	77
2	Evidence of moderate psychological distress	10	23
3	Severe problems with psychological distress	-	-

Table 4 showed that the majority 34 (77%) of them had evidence of Better mental health only 10 (23%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress.

**Table: 5 Frequency and percentage distribution of level of psychological distress among B.Sc Nursing IV year students (N=46)**

S.No	Level of Psychological Distress	No.of Respondents (n)	Percentage %
1	Better mental health	40	87
2	Evidence of moderate psychological distress	6	13
3	Severe problems with psychological distress	-	-

Table 5 depicted that the majority 40 (87%) of them had evidence of Better mental health only 6 (13%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress.

### Discussion

Psychological distress is a major problem of present era especially for adolescence. It is true to emphasize that with advancement of science and technology everyone wants to move forward and reach on the peak of his/her success, complete others and live more luxurious life for which they struggle round „o“ clock. As a result they experienced high level of stress which may have adverse impact on their emotional, physiological, cognitive, and behavioural state. Individuals want to grow or develop and want to become perfect, they set goals about their future, and face a number of problems like academic, financial, interpersonal, and parental pressure etc. in fulfilling their goals. Therefore there is a need to increase level of self-efficacy, enhance perfection in work and develop positive attitudes for better fulfilment of goal and achievement. When individuals fail to achieve their goals due to low level of self-efficacy, maladaptive perfectionism or pessimistic attribution style, and or either curb by family or society, they experience high level of stress which lead to psychological distress and play an important role in development of different types of psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression, mood disorders or various physical problems like cancer, heart attack, and migraines etc. Therefore, the present research is aimed to assess the psychological distress among adolescents students.<sup>8</sup>

The present study results showed that , In B.Sc(N) I year, majority of 27 (61%) of them had evidence of moderate level of psychological distress 14 (32%) of them had better mental health and 3 (7%) of them had

severe problems with psychological distress. In B.Sc(N) II Year, majority 29 (61%) of them had evidence of Better mental health , 18 (39%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress. In B.Sc(N) III Year, majority 34 (77%) of them had evidence of Better mental health only 10 (23%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress. In final year, majority 40 (87%) of them had evidence of Better mental health only 6 (13%) of them had Evidence of moderate psychological distress.

This study finding was supported by the study done by **Ana Maria Vazquez-Casares(2014)** a conducted study on psychological distress health sciences college students and its relationship with academic engagement. To determine the prevalence of psychological distress and its relationship with academic engagement (absorption, dedication and vigor), sex and degree among students from four public universities A non-experimental, comparative correlational, quantitative investigation without intervention. Study population: 1840 Nursing and physical therapy students. The data collection tool used was a questionnaire A prevalence of psychological distress was found to be 32.2%.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

The present study assessed the psychological distress among nursing students in SRM College of nursing, Kattankulathur. The results of the study concluded that psychological distress was increased in first year nursing students which was greatly reduced in final year nursing students. This study shows results that the imperative need to understand about level of psychological distress among nursing students.

### **Implications**

Nurses can provide more consideration to the First year nursing students and give more care and support for them.

As a nurse researcher, promote more research on psychological distress among nursing students.

Disseminate the findings of the research through conferences and seminars and publishing those researches in nursing journals.

**Conflict of Interest:** Declared None

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